

Teaching the 2 Year Old Basic Reining Maneuvers

In this article we are going to cover what to ask for and expect from your Reining horse during the period of the 3rd to 6 months in training. After you have your 2 year old where you have relaxed forward motion in an open area, somewhere other than a small round pen, you are going to want to start his training on the basic maneuvers needed for a Reining pattern. These include: large fast circles, slow small circles, spins and stops. I do not work on lead changes until further along in a more advanced stage of their training. In order to start training your horse for anything, he needs to be mentally ready, quiet and confident with you and his surroundings. For the average horse this takes about 30 days or more. I do not wear spurs for the first few weeks of riding my 2 year olds, but once they are ready, I would have my spurs on.

When you feel they are at this point, the first thing I start to work on with my Reining prospects is teaching them to find their circle. Once I have them warmed up, I start to lope on the left or right lead, whichever is the correct lead for the direction I am going. I stay in one end of my arena and steer them with my neck rein and direct rein back to the circle when they try to leave on their own. At this point I am not trying to frame the horse with my hands and am not worried about his head set. I just sit in the middle and correct when they make a mistake. Once I feel the horse has locked into the circle, than I will let him stop and take a break. I always want to be looking to reward my horse with a break when he has earned it. Keep in mind that your prospect may not be able to lope for long periods, so pay attention not to over exert him until he builds up his stamina. I work this circle drill both directions every day.

The next thing I teach them is the basics or beginning of the spin. I do this by getting control of their shoulders. From a stand still I lay the neck rein and open my inside hand to gently pull their nose in the direction of the spin. I lightly bump with my

outside leg until I can get one step of the maneuver, so that their shoulders will travel sideways. I slowly build on this in both directions. One step will turn in to 2 and 3 etc. You need to take your time and not be rushed to try and get speed right away. More important is getting them comfortable with moving their shoulders sideways, as this is not a natural movement for the horse.

In teaching your Reining horse to stop, from the very beginning I try to encourage their natural tendencies to stop. Most of the Reining horses today are bred with the desire to slide programmed in them almost instinctively. Before you begin to ask your horse to slide, you need to have sliding plates put on by your Farrier. You will discourage your horse from stopping from the get go if you direct them to drive hard with their hind quarters to stop and there is no give to allow this to happen. I start teaching my 2 year olds to lope in a straight line from one end of the arena to the other, this is called fencing.

From a working lope, this would be considered first gear in the speed stages, I try and get them to stay between the reins and encourage them not to be afraid of the fence. I let them rest at both ends of the arena, beside the fence. When they are relaxed doing this, I will ask my horse to stop about 3/4s of the way down the arena. I will do this by saying whoa and taking the slack out of the reins, being very slow with my hands. Some horses will slide the very first time and others it will take them some time to figure out what you are asking them to do. When all forward motion has stopped, I drop my hands, releasing pressure on the bit for a second or two and then pick the slack back up on my reins, asking the

horse to take a few steps back. This is because I want to encourage them to get back on their hind quarters. You want to make it a habit that your horse will think back up at the end of every stop. I repeat this process until the horse is confident and understands what I am asking and then I will increase my speed.

Depending on your horses mental and physical capabilities, they will progress at different rates. The main thing is to be patient and habitual, do the same thing every time you come out. In our next article we will look more specifically at the circles; breaking the maneuver down and talking about a horse with more advanced circles.

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Nick Valentine owns Valentine Reining Horses in Lucama, N.C. He focuses on showing, training, sales, coaching and clinics at Francois Gauthier's facility, Sunny Pines Farm go to www.valentinereining.com for more.



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